A Beginner's Guide To Dog Shows

The World of Dog Shows

Showing dogs is a great sport where the thrill of competition is combined with the joy of seeing beautiful dogs. Dog shows are one of nine types of AKC dog events in which AKC-registered dogs can compete. Other AKC events include tests of instinct and trainability, such as field trials or herding tests.

At a *dog show*, the main consideration is the dog's *conformation* or overall appearance and structure.

PHOTOS BY MARY BLOOM

The Role of the Judge

Judges examine the dogs and place them in accordance to how close each dog compares with their mental image of the "perfect" dog as described in the breed's official standard. These standards include qualifications for structure, temperament and movement. In short, they describe the characteristics that allow the breed to perform the function for which it was bred.

These official written standards are maintained by each breed's national club and published in AKC's *The Complete Dog Book*.

The judges are experts in the breeds they are judging. They examine or "go over" each dog with their hands to see if the teeth, muscles, bones and coat texture match the standard. They examine each dog in profile for general balance, and watch each dog *gait,* or move, to see how all of those features fit together in action.

Specialty vs All-Breed

There are two types of conformation dog shows: specialty and all-breed.

- Specialty shows are limited to dogs of a specific breed or grouping of breeds; for example, the Bulldog Club of America Specialty is for Bulldogs only.
- All-breed shows, on the other hand, are open to over 130 breeds recognized by AKC.

How A Dog Show Works

Dog shows are basically a process of elimination, with one dog being named Best In Show at the end of the day. (The chart on page 7 illustrates the steps in this process.) Along the way, some dogs accumulate points towards the title "AKC Champion."

Championship Points

Most dogs in competition at conformation shows are competing for points toward their championship. It takes **fifteen** points, including two *majors* (wins of three, four or five points) under at least three different judges to become an AKC "Champion of Record." This is indicated by "Ch." before the dog's name.

At one show, a dog can earn from one to five points towards a champion title, depending on the number of males or females actually in competition for the breed. (Male dogs are often referred to as dogs, while female dogs are referred to as bitches.)

Once the dog is a champion, it can compete for Best of Breed without having to win in the other *classes*.

Types of Classes

There are six different regular classes in which dogs may be entered. The following classes are offered for male and female dogs separately in each breed entered at the show.

PUPPY - Six-to-nine or nine-to-twelve months.

TWELVE-TO-EIGHTEEN MONTHS

NOVICE - Never won a blue ribbon in any of the other classes, or has won less than three ribbons in the novice class.

BRED BY EXHIBITOR - The exhibitor is also the breeder.

AMERICAN-BRED - Dog's parents mated in America and the dog was born in America.

OPEN - Any dog of that breed.

After these classes are judged, all the dogs that won first place in the classes compete again to see who is the best of the winning dogs. This is also done separately for male and female dogs. *Only the best male (Winners Dog) and the best female (Winners Bitch) receive championship points.* (A Reserve Winner award is given in each sex to the runner-up.)

The Winners Dog and Winners Bitch then go on to compete with the champions for the title of BEST OF BREED. At the end of the Best of Breed Competition, three awards are usually given:

Best of Breed - the dog judged as the best in its breed category.

Best of Winners - the dog judged as best between the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.

Best of Opposite Sex - the best dog that is the opposite sex of the Best of Breed winner.

Only the Best of Breed winners advance to compete in the *group* competition. Each AKC-recognized breed falls into one of seven group classifications (see page 6). Four placements are awarded in each *group*, but only the first place winner advances to the Best In Show competition.

The Seven Groups in All-Breed Shows

SPORTING — These dogs were bred to hunt game birds both on land and in the water. The breeds in this group include Pointers, Retrievers, Setters and Spaniels.

HOUNDS — Were used for hunting other game by sight or scent. These breeds include such dogs as Beagles, Bassets, Dachshunds and Greyhounds.

WORKING — These dogs were used to pull carts, guard property and for search and rescue. Among the breeds in this group are the Akita, Boxer, Doberman Pinscher and St. Bernard.

TERRIER — This is the largest group, with breeds including the Airedale, Bull Terrier and Scottish Terrier. Terriers were bred to rid property of vermin such as rats.

TOY — These dogs were bred to be the prized companions of royalty. This group includes little dogs such as the Chihuahua, Maltese, Pomeranian and Pug.

NON-SPORTING — This diverse group includes the Chow Chow, Bulldog, Dalmatian and Poodle. These dogs share attributes but don't fit into the mold of other dog groups.

HERDING — These dogs were bred to help shepherds and ranchers herd their livestock. Among this group are the Briard, Collie, German Shepherd Dog and Old English Sheepdog.

Finally, the seven group winners are brought into the ring where they compete for BEST IN SHOW, the highest award at a dog show.

The Road to Best in Show

RIBBONS

Each dog that receives an award is given a ribbon by the judge. The color of the ribbon denotes the type of award the dog has won.

Blue - awarded for first place in any regular class. Also awarded for the winner of each group competition, usually in "rosette" form.

Red - awarded for second place in each class. Also awarded for second place in each group competition, usually in "rosette" form.

Yellow - awarded for third place in each class. Also awarded for third place of each group competition, usually in "rosette" form.

White - awarded for fourth place in each class. Also awarded for fourth place of each group competition, usually in "rosette" form.

Purple – awarded to the winners of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch classes. Since these are the classes in which championship points are earned, they are highly coveted.

Purple and White - awarded to the Reserve Winner, that is, the runner-up winner of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch classes.

Blue and White - awarded to the dog which wins Best of Winners, that is the best of Winners Dog and Winners Bitch winners.

Purple and Gold - awarded to the dog judged "Best of Breed" in each breed competition. This is highly coveted as it is the ticket to advance into the group competition.

Red and White - awarded to the Best of Opposite Sex. This award is given to the best dog in the breed that is the opposite sex of the Best of Breed winner.

Red, White and Blue - only one of these is awarded at the end of each show. It goes to the ultimate award winner, the ***BEST IN SHOW***.

Tips for the First-Time Spectator

- Study the show's catalog or schedule, usually sold near the entrance to the show. This will tell you in which ring and at what time each breed is being judged.

- If you are interested in a particular breed, plan to arrive early. In most cases, once each breed has been judged, those dogs are allowed to leave; if you arrive later, you will miss seeing them.

- Dog show aisles are often crowded, and people can become separated. Pick out a meeting place in case anyone gets lost. The Superintendent's booth is a good choice.

- If you miss the breed judging, you can still see the judging of the seven groups, which takes place prior to the Best In Show judging and will most likely include one representative of your favorite breed.

- If open to spectators, visit the grooming area and speak with professional groomers for tips on keeping your dog looking his best.

- However tempting, do not pet a dog without asking for permission first. The dog may have just been groomed in preparation for being judged.

- At each dog show you will find vendors and information booths. Many club booths offer helpful information to the general public.
- Wear comfortable shoes - you'll be doing quite a bit of walking. Unless you bring a chair or arrive early, be prepared to stand most of the time, as seating is usually limited.

- If you are thinking about getting a pure-bred dog, talk to the breeders and handlers - they are experts in their breeds and can tell you all you want to know (and more) about their breeds. It is best to approach them after they have shown their dog, when they are not too busy to talk.
- If you bring a stroller to a show, be careful that you do not run over any dog's tail, or that your child does not grab or poke the dogs it can reach. Avoid ring entrances, which are especially crowded.

Common Dog Show Terms

Angulation - Angles created by bones meeting at their given joints.

Baiting - Using liver or some treat to get the dog's attention and have him look alert.

Bench Show - A dog show at which the dogs are kept on assigned benches when not being shown in competition, thus facilitating the viewing/discussion of the breeds by attendees, exhibitors and breeders.

Exhibitor - One who is involved in bringing a dog to a show and entering it in the appropriate class.

Fancier - One who is especially interested and usually active in some phase of the sport of pure-bred dogs.

Gait - The way a dog moves; movement is a good indicator of structure, temperament and condition.

Groom - To brush, comb, trim or otherwise make a dog's coat neat.

Handler - A person or agent who takes a dog into the show ring or works the dog at a field trial or other performance event.

Heel - A command to a dog to keep close beside its handler.

Match Show - Usually an informal dog show at which no championship points are awarded.

Miscellaneous Class - Transitory class for breeds attempting to advance to full AKC recognition.

Pedigree - The written record of a dog's family tree of three generations or more.

Points - Credits earned towards championship status.

Soundness - Refers to mental and physical well-being.

Stacking - The process of posing the dog's legs and body to create a pleasing profile.

Winners - An award given at dog shows to the best dog (Winners Dog) and best bitch (Winners Bitch) competing in the regular classes of each breed.

Helpful AKC Resources

The Complete Dog Book - a comprehensive glossary of dog-related terms, pictures, histories and standards of all AKC-recognized breeds.

Pure-Bred Dogs/American Kennel GAZETTE - a monthly magazine with articles on health, breeding, training and showing. A supplement to the **GAZETTE** is the *Events Calendar*, a listing of upcoming shows, obedience trials, tracking tests, field trails and herding events.

American Kennel Club Dog Care and Training - this book shows you how to select the right dog, how to keep it healthy and looking great and how to train it in the five basic commands every dog should know.

American Kennel Club Dog Care and Training Video - a video on basic care and training that compliments the **Dog Care and Training** book.

For more information on these and other AKC publications call 919-233-9780.

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